Passports issued in Tamil Nadu

2527. SHRI D. RAJA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of passports issued in Tamil Nadu in 2006-07;

(b) the number of passports issued in Tamil Nadu in the current fiscal year upto July 31, 2007;

(c) whether it is a fact that there is a backlog of applications from various districts in Tamil Nadu; and

(d) in what manner Government propose to streamline the passport system in Tamil Nadu to make it easier for poorer sections to get their passports?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) 5,70,842 passports were issued in Tamil Nadu during 2006-2007.

(b) 1,92,979 passports were issued in Tamil Nadu in the current fiscal year upto July, 2007.

(c) and (d) Passport Offices in Tamil Nadu are instructed and offered assistance from time to time to clear any backlog resulting from rush of applications. To expedite issue of passports, State police authorities have been urged to complete the police verification reports in time. Public has been encouraged to file applications 'online'. In addition, the Government have further liberalised passport rules in December 2006. Two more passport offices are proposed to be opened in Madurai and Coimbatore.

Issuance of fake passports

2528. DR. GYAN PRAKASH PILANIA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether CAG has pointed out that a well-oiled racket involving local police and passport offices, was found issuing fake passports;

(b) whether Delhi and Bareilly regional passport offices were found issuing passports to foreign nationals from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka;

(c) whether a number of incidents in which lost passports landed in the hands of terrorists and criminals were also reported;

(d) whether CAG blamed the Ministry for its failure to initiate corrective measures to strengthen its internal controls;

(e) whether cases have been registered for theft of passports; and

(f) Government's reaction to the above scenario?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) While the Government has not come across any

organised racket, as mentioned in the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on the Performance audit of Passport, Visa and Consular Services covering the period 2000-01 to 2004-05, 18 cases have come to its notice, where Indian passports were issued by Passport Offices on the basis of forged documents to the nationals of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

(c) The Ministry has not come across any such incident.

(d) The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) in his report has observed certain deficiencies and has made recommendations to improve the performance of Passport, Visa and Consular services.

(e) and (f) The Government have been taking action against errant officials by sanctioning prosecution by the concerned agencies or through disciplinary proceedings, as required. The Government have also been taking a number of corrective measures to check malpractices and deficiencies in Passport Offices, such as regular and surprise inspections including vigilance inspections of Passport Offices, strengthening of vigilance mechanism in the Central Passport Organisation and ensuring greater accountability in the working of Passport Offices. The Government have also initiated steps to introduce biometric passports.

Indian Doctors in Britain

2529. SHRI P.R.RAJAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the complaints raised by Indian Doctors in Britain that they are victims of racist mind set; and

(b) if so, whether Government have taken any diplomatic measures to raise this issue?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) Yes.

(b) Government of India have taken up this issue with concerned UK authorities. The UK General Medical Council (GMC) is examining allegations of prevalence of racism in the work place. GMC has agreed to establish a permanent mechanism with all stakeholders, including British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (BAPIO), to deliberate on such important issues related to doctors, the report of which could be published as an annual review to make the system more transparent, open and fair to all doctors.

Urban infrastructure, poverty alleviation and housing projects

2530. SHRI BALAVANT *ALIAS* BAL APTE:
SHRI VINAY KATIYAR:

Will the Minister of HOUSING AND URBAN POVERTY ALLEVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether some projects relating to urban infrastructure, poverty alleviation and housing sector are being implemented in various States including Maharashtra with foreign assistance;